

Griffith  
History

# The History of the Civil Town of Griffith

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Claude Patterson, Jr.

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In 1891 to 1893 when most of the subdivisions of the town were laid out by the owners, a man by the name of Griffith was one of the early real estate men from whom the town later adopted its name. The town in the early 90's was marshy, with practically no drainage.

Griffith has always been noted for its amount of railroads. It has, I have heard, been represented in Ripley's "Believe it or Not" article, stating that Griffith had the greatest number of railroads for a town of its size than any other town. The first railroad to pass through Griffith was the Michigan Central which was started in 1861.

The town was incorporated in 1904 and at that time it had three wards, and was in three townships, Calumet, North and St. John. The first town clerk was M. J. Beiriger and the three town trustees were Moses L. Toohill, president, Mathias Grimmer and Peter W. Govert. The first town marshal was John Harkenrider. John R. Taylor, a Civil War veteran, was appointed town marshal in 1908, and is still living in Lowell, Indiana, being about 94 years old.

The first pipe line company was the Prairie Gas and Oil Company which was granted this privilege by an ordinance in September, 1905.

In September, 1906, the town board moved that two signs be printed, one to be posted at the north and one at the south corporated limits of the town, limiting the speed of automobiles through town at a speed of eight miles an hour. In 1906 the town purchased nine gas-burning street lamps.



The first cement sidewalks were constructed in 1907.

Previous to 1911, the town meetings were held in John Harkenrider's hall. In this year a contract was let to G. P. Pearson for the construction of a new building to be used as a town hall. This building was built at a cost of \$4,853.

In 1914, twenty-eight electric street lamps were purchased. In 1914 the land north of Glen Park avenue, which comprised the fourth ward, was granted.

The Griffith water works was started in 1920 with a bond issue of \$26,000, with approximately forty patrons. Now it has over four hundred patrons with more than nine miles of mains at a cost of over \$84,000. A contract for the drilling of a new well has been signed.

In 1920 the town board felt the chemical wagons which were used as fire protection were inadequate. At this time the town purchased a Reo combination chemical and hose truck at a cost of \$3,750. In 1921 an organized volunteer fire department was started with a salary for its thirty members.

In 1923 Griffith started to expand and the town board found it necessary to pass an electrical ordinance requiring all electrical work done to be inspected and a permit for anyone to do electrical work.

Up to 1925 the sidewalks that had been built were four feet wide and the sidewalks built after this time were five feet wide.

In 1927 the town bought a pair of stop and go lights for the corners of Broad and Main streets at a cost of \$577. The service was continued until 1933 when the town found it necessary to cut expenses. They discontinued the service at that time.

In 1928 a bond issue for \$15,000 was drawn up for the drilling of a new water well to bolster the supply of water for Griffith. This bond issue was also used to expand the water system.

In August, 1930, the country was covered with a drouth which resulted in endangering the water supply of Griffith. The town at this time passed an ordinance which is still on record, but not enforced, prohibiting anyone from using



water except between the hours of 6:00 a. m. to 7:00 a. m. and from 7:00 p. m. to 8:00 p. m.

Up to 1930, the town was not overly supplied with adequate drainage, but in this year a program was started to increase the amount and efficiency of drainage. The Wiggs Avenue drain was built at a cost of \$16,000 in this year and the Jay Street drain was put in at a cost of \$12,000. Later in 1930 a number two drain was put in on Wiggs avenue at a cost of \$32,000. In 1937 the Miller Street drains were constructed at a cost of \$14,000, making a total of \$74,000 worth of bonds for drainage.

The 1930 census gave Griffith a population of 1,156 persons. There is no information as to the outcome of the 1940 census, but it has been estimated the 1930 population has probably been doubled.

The year of 1931 brought about an ordinance stating that all dogs were at no time to be off the premises of their owners unless they are under control. All dogs found not under these conditions shall be destroyed.

The Griffith town board passed an ordinance in 1934 which prohibited anyone from selling hard liquor and regulated the time of business hours. This ordinance also defined the type and manner of entertainment to be provided in taverns.

Previous to the year 1935 the offices of the town clerk and treasurer had been separate offices. At this time, the board made an ordinance combining the two offices. Adolph Penning was the first person to fill the office of clerk-treasurer.

In 1936 Griffith adopted a definite system of street numbering, due to the rapid growth of the town. At this time the renaming of the streets took place.

You have all at one time or other, probably used the yellow street lamp at the north end of Broad street as a means of direction for strangers at night. This is a 10,000 lumen sodium vapor lamp which was obtained from the Northern Indiana Public Service Company in 1936.

In 1937 the state highway department took over Broad street and made it state route number 73. This has been a step in advancement for Griffith as it relieves Griffith of



the duties of maintaining the road and also gives us a first class road through town.

The town by 1938 had grown considerably by the number of new houses built. This year a zoning ordinance was passed that gave the town a high rating and raised the prestige in the town. In the ordinance a building commissioner and a requirement for building permits were established.

In 1939 the town board passed an ordinance for a safe and sane Fourth of July. The ordinance prohibited the sale of firecrackers and anything relating to fireworks. A provision was made for a public display of fireworks under a licensed operator.

In the last year, 1939, we have been fortunate through the efforts of Mr. Sam B. Woods, to obtain a building for the Griffith Public Library, as an extension of the Gary Public Library.

In 1939 another electrical ordinance was passed which required all work done in the town was to be done by an electrician licensed by a town, by examination. The ordinance also set up an up-to-date electrical code.

The population of the town in 1939 made it necessary to re-district the town to create the Fifth ward.

The present town officials are as follows:

James Phillips, Board member.

Mat VisConte, Board member.

Harry Govert, Board member.

Peter Lolkema, Board member.

Victor Rutledge, Board member.

Claude Patterson, Marshal and waterworks supt.

Cecil Paul, Street commissioner.

Adolph Penning, Clerk-treasurer.

Robert McFarland, Fire chief.

Clarence DeReamer, Electrical inspector.

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